

# ELECTRONIC RESOURCES REVIEWS

**ConsumerLab.com.** ConsumerLab.com, 333 Mamaroneck Avenue, White Plains, NY 10605; 914.722.9149; subscription@consumerlab.com; <http://www.consumerlab.com>; annual subscription, \$24; discounts for multiyear subscriptions available; contact groupsubscriptions@consumerlab.com for group and institutional pricing.

The US government does not review dietary supplement products before they are marketed. According to the law, manufacturers of these supplements are responsible for making sure their products are safe and for determining that the claims on their labels are accurate and truthful [1]. Consequently, consumers often have difficulty finding reliable information on these types of supplements. ConsumerLab.com is a privately held company that attempts to fill this need. Its mission is "to identify the best quality health and nutrition products through independent testing."

The ConsumerLab.com Website is divided into several sections, including Laboratory Test Results, Where to Buy Products, Natural Products Encyclopedia, and Recalls & Warnings.

## Laboratory Test Results

ConsumerLab.com contracts with independent laboratories to test different kinds of health, wellness, and nutrition products such as vitamins and minerals, herbals, and sports and energy products. The results of these tests are the primary focus of the Website. Some of the products recently tested include echinacea, St. John's wort, and zinc. The criteria ConsumerLab.com uses to test products include identity, potency, purity, bioavailability, and consistency. The criteria and guidelines for these testing programs are described on the Website. ConsumerLab.com buys products from retail stores, catalogs, online retailers, or multilevel marketing companies. It does not accept products directly from manufacturers. Products are retested every few years.

All of the Laboratory Test Results sections are divided into four sections: Background, Test Methodology, Results, and Consumer Tips. The information in the Background section describes the supplement and its common uses. The Test Methodology section describes the tested quality concerns, including a link to a page explaining how products have been selected for the test methodology, and the criteria a product must meet to achieve a "passing" score. The Results section starts out with a summary of the test results followed by a table listing what products were reviewed and whether or not they met the criteria. The Consumer Tips section offers advice to consumers who are considering taking the product. Subscribers can view these reports in full. Non-subscribers can read truncated versions of the reports. Approximately half of the reports indicate the date the review was posted.

## Where to Buy Products

Some of the listed name-brand products contain paid links to product label information from supplement manufacturers. These links are clearly indicated as advertisements. Manufacturers of products that pass ConsumerLab.com's testing can enroll in ConsumerLab.com's CL Approved Quality Product Seal licensing program, which allows them to add ConsumerLab.com's approval symbol to the product's label. Vendors pay an advertising fee to be listed in the Where to Buy Products section.

## Natural Products Encyclopedia

The information in the Natural Products Encyclopedia is provided by Natural Pharmacist<sup>®</sup> (HealthGate Data) and is divided into three categories: Herbs & Supplements, Conditions, and Drug Interactions. Each section contains an alphanumeric index and is searchable by keyword. The basic entries include principle and other proposed

uses, scientific evidence for effectiveness, suggested dosage, safety issues, and current references from biomedical research journals.

## Recalls & Warnings

Alerts relating to dietary supplements and other nutrition products from government agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Federal Trade Commission, and Health Canada are listed in the Recalls & Warnings section. The full text of the most current alert is available to both subscribers and non-subscribers. As of May 11, 2004, the most recent warning, posted on April 2, 2004, involved the FDA's warning letters to sixteen dietary supplement distributors for making false and misleading claims for weight loss products promoted over the Internet. Previous warnings and recalls listed in reverse chronological order, going back to January 2002, are available to subscribers.

## Conclusion

The ConsumerLab.com Website is easy to navigate. The main navigation bar appears in the left column on every page of the Website. The Search this Site feature covers all sections. Because currently less than 100 supplements have been reviewed, finding a specific Laboratory Test Result report is not difficult using the four categorized drop-down menus (Herbals, Vitamins and Minerals, Other Supplements, and Nutritional Products: Foods and Beverages) on the Laboratory Test Results page. As this number grows, some users may become frustrated, particularly if they are not certain which category contains a particular supplement. Even though the paid advertisements are identified, novice Web users may have difficulty discerning which sections are impartial information from ConsumerLab.com and which are paid advertising from supplement manufacturers. Because some of the Product Reviews and Natural Products Encyclopedia entries are rather lengthy, the option of a

printer friendly page format would be helpful.

ConsumerLab.com is a useful Website for consumers looking for easy-to-read information on herbals and other types of supplements.

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## Reference

1. US FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION. Dietary supplements: tips for the savvy supplement user: making informed decisions and evaluating information. [Web document]. Jan 2002. [cited 15 Jun 2004]. <<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-savvy.html>>.

**STAT!Ref 3.3.1.** Teton Data Systems, P.O. Box 4798, 125 South King St., Jackson, WY 83001; 800.901.5494; fax, 307.739.1229; dserra@statref.com; <http://www.statref.com/>; subscription costs vary depending on format and titles selected, see [http://www.statref.com/titles\\_prices/htm\\_files/pricing.asp](http://www.statref.com/titles_prices/htm_files/pricing.asp) or call for quote.

STAT!Ref, available from Teton Data Systems, is an online "full-text, cross-searchable information [resource] for the healthcare professional." The various STAT!Ref collections contain more than seventy titles, with most available in all four editions: Web, CD, DVD, and personal digital assistant (PDA). Each title in the STAT!Ref package is priced separately. A complete list of titles is available on the company's Website, where users can price individual titles to create a customized holdings list. Since 2003, the number of full-text books has jumped from thirty-five to over sixty titles, with thirty-six Brandon/Hill titles. Some recent additions to the list of titles include *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine* and *Hurst's The Heart*. Other titles, such as *Mosby's Drug Consult* and *Merck's*

*Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy* are updated regularly. Updates to the online books are seamless to the user and painless for the customer.

STAT!Ref specializes in full-text book titles, with fully searchable chapters and sections. From the main search page, users have the option to search all, some, or one of the titles to which the institution subscribes. A search across one or several titles yields a relevance-ranked list of matching chapters. Boolean and adjacency operators are available.

The Physicians Information and Education Resource (PIER) from the American College of Physicians is a recent addition to the roster of resources from STAT!Ref. PIER is a collection of 245 Web-based, evidence-based medicine (EBM) modules for use by physicians at the point of care. The search interface is easy to use. Modules are grouped by Disease, with additional topics in Screening and Prevention, Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Ethical and Legal Issues, and Procedures. Lexi-Comp Drug Information (2001) is also included.

An@tomy.tv is a new Web service (with a few titles available on CD) that provides users with a three-dimensional (3D) multimedia experience to view human anatomy, including cross-sectional views that can be easily manipulated for viewing. An@tomy.tv provides access to the "world's most detailed 3D anatomical models online," perfect for medical, nursing, and allied health students. Each title has 3D images with texts about the anatomy, quizzes to test the knowledge gained, and common patient diagnoses seen in everyday medical practice. The images are stunning and easy to understand. The individually priced selections are: Complete Human Anatomy; Interactive Functional Anatomy; Thorax and Pelvis; Spine with Head/Neck; Thorax/Pelvis and Spine with Head/Neck; Interactive Functional Anatomy, Thorax/Pelvis; Interactive Functional Anatomy, Spine with Head/Neck; Interactive Functional Anatomy, Thorax/Pelvis and

Spine with Head/Neck; and Complete Human Anatomy, Interactive Functional Anatomy.

STAT!Ref now includes direct links to PubMed for searches of MEDLINE, Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), and the journals database. Stedman's Medical Dictionary is included as a bonus for all subscribers. Other resources—such as handouts, access cards, tutorials, and posters—are available via an online ordering system or by request from a sales representative.

STAT!Ref is "the little company that could." Working with customer service representatives over the telephone and with a regional sales representative in-person is easy. Questions are addressed quickly with few problems. The only drawback for East Coast users when contacting STAT!Ref is the time difference, because the company is located in Jackson, Wyoming. If your library is looking for a vendor who provides an a-la-cart list of electronic book titles and multimedia for end users, you cannot go wrong with STAT!Ref. Their pricing is reasonable, and clients in all service situations are treated well. Downtime for the resource has been minimal in this reviewer's three years' experience of working with STAT!Ref.

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**Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR).** Centre for Global eHealth Innovation, 190 Elizabeth Street, Toronto ON M5G 2C4, Canada; 416.340.4800; fax, 416.340.3595; [jmir@yi.com](mailto:jmir@yi.com); <http://www.jmir.org>; ISSN: 1438-8871; open access.

The Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR) began publishing in

1999 as a free, electronic, open access journal of cyber-medicine and electronic health (i.e., all aspects of the intersection of health and the Internet). The editor-in-chief and publisher since 2001 is Gunther Eysenbach, senior scientist, Centre for Global eHealth Information. JMIR is an international, interdisciplinary, scientific, peer-reviewed journal focused on research information and communication in the health care field using Internet- and intranet-related technologies. Fully indexed in seven services including MEDLINE, JMIR invites research papers from the medical sciences and from computer, behavioral, social, and communication sciences; psychology; library sciences; informatics; human-computer interaction studies; and related fields. JMIR is the official journal of both the Society for the Internet in Medicine (sponsors of the MedNet conference) and the Internet Healthcare Coalition.

JMIR's goal is to help health care and medical professionals and consumers maximize the use of the Internet to deliver quality health care and health information. To achieve this goal, JMIR publishes original research reporting the application, development, and evaluation of information technology related to the Internet, as well as proposals, reviews, and opinion papers on standards, policies, and legal and ethical issues of e-health. Some sample article titles from 2004 include:

■ "Can Clinical Trials Requiring Frequent Participant Contact Be Conducted over the Internet?"

■ "Pharmacist Computer Skills and Needs Assessment Survey"

■ "Experience and Attitudes Towards Information Technology Among First-Year Medical Students in Denmark"

■ "Using Claims Data to Examine Patients Using Practice-Based Internet Communication: Is There a Clinical Digital Divide?"

Journal sections have clearly defined editorial policies and identified contact editors. The sections are Editorials and Guest Editorials, Original Papers, Policy Papers and Proposals, Letters to the Editor, Reviews/Tutorials, Book Reviews and Critically Appraised Topics in Communication (CATCH-IT) Reports, Health Informatics, and Technology. Features of the journal include a rigorous but speedy peer-review process, an author acceptance rate of about 40%, and a \$500 article fee with waivers and institutional memberships available. Advertisements are clearly identified, although their presence in the left-hand column and on page banners detracts from the scholarly appearance of the site.

The journal is a reliable, current, and well-maintained scientific publication. The current issue and archives are available through a search engine and the tables of contents on the journal Website and through Web search engines such as Google. An advantage of the electronic format is the incorporation of various dynamic multimedia capabilities in many articles, because the journal is not dependent on paper format. Emblematic of electronic publications, the JMIR is published continuously, offering information as it develops or as soon as articles are available (peer reviewed and copy edited). Articles are collated into four archival "issues" and one "volume" per year. Individuals can sign up to receive the table of contents of each issue via email.

JMIR is a nonprofit academic project, published free on the Inter-

net. Institutional members may purchase subscriptions to print volumes for a fee. The editorial board is convinced that the Internet opens ways to publish and peer review scholarly work, independent of commercial publishers. They also think that research work should remain open to be shared and redistributed by others and that it should be available to anyone. JMIR serves as a "publishing laboratory" to explore and experiment with novel means of scholarly communication, including open source publishing, multimedia appendices, and dynamic articles with real-time statistical analysis. The journal also experiments with cross-media publishing techniques, using extensible markup language (XML) and other technologies.

JMIR's disadvantages are related to the journal's advantages in that some fundamental issues are not yet clarified. For example, the openness of the information available through this research-oriented journal calls for the establishment of an ethical code of conduct for publishing raw data [1] and a better definition of the role of modern journals [2]. Neither of these issues has been clearly addressed by JMIR.

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2. PEEK R. E-prints are gaining momentum. *Inform Today* 2000 Oct;17(9):50.